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## 'True examples': Two Amherst Education Center students find solace in smaller class setting

Justin Faulconer

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Isiah Robinson (left) and Bronson Ramsey stand outside the Amherst Education Center for a portrait May 16.

Paige Dingler, The News & Advance

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**O**f the roughly 280 students to take the stage May 26 during Amherst County High School's graduation, two in particular — Isiah Robinson and Bronson Ramsey — are representing the Amherst Education Center, the Madison Heights

school where they have spent their high school years.

Isaiah, 17, and Bronson, 18, each moved to Amherst County with their families before starting high school. Bronson went to Monelison Middle School, which is next door to the Amherst Education Center (AEC), and Isaiah also attended Monelison.

In a recent joint interview at AEC, Isaiah and Bronson each spoke of the smaller school serving as a good environment for their high school careers. Bronson said the high school was too packed with students and his grades improved at AEC.

Isaiah also said his academics saw major improvement at AEC, a setting he added his mother was on board with.

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“I needed help and she saw this as the best option for me,” Isaiah said. “For me it was more like a second opportunity ... The classes are smaller ... The teacher has time to explain and make things easier for you.”

He said he likes the classes with just himself, a few other students and the teacher. In that setting, the peer pressure is much less and there's no embarrassment in asking a teacher to explain if he doesn't understand something, he said.

When asked if he is glad to have that option, he said: “Oh yeah.”

He said the AEC is a much less scary environment, a sentiment Bronson agrees with.

“When I moved to this school it was way better,” Bronson said, adding of the teachers: “They’re great. They’re really funny sometimes. They are really understanding if you ask a bunch of questions. They usually try to help you the best they can. They’re all awesome to me.”

The smaller class sizes and more attention from teachers is helpful, Isaiah said.

“They do the best they can to make school life comfortable for you,” he said.

Bronson said he also enjoys the relationship with Ernest Penn, the school’s administrator.

“You respect him and he respects you — that’s how it goes,” Bronson said.

After previously going to school in the Lynchburg area, Bronson said he has enjoyed the move to Amherst where he forged great relationships with other students and teachers.

“I loved it,” Bronson said. “I made new friends. You can actually ask questions and tell jokes — basically it’s like family group in our classroom.”

After graduating this month, Isaiah has set his sights set on going to Central Virginia Community College and learning welding. He became interested in the topic during a visit to a local steel mill as part of the Jobs for Amherst Graduates program, which he described as helpful.

“I heard the pay is really good too,” Isaiah said.

He also works at the county’s animal shelter where he and his grandmother volunteered and enjoys interacting with cats and dogs, feeding them and cleaning the kennels.

Bronson plans on going to CVCC and pursuing a career in cyber security, a subject that interests him.

Kellie Cook, an educator at AEC, has high praise for both students ahead of graduation day at Liberty University's Vines Center.

"Bronson always exudes a positive attitude and a willingness to help others," Cook said. "Isaiah is an independent worker who stays focused and loves his peace and quiet."

Amanda Stanbery, a school counselor at AEC, said she first met Isaiah as a six-grader at her technology class at Monelison. The two crossed paths again when he entered AEC in eighth grade.

"He's a model student," Stanbery said. "He's polite, does his work, he asks questions when he doesn't understand, and will help you in any way he can. I've enjoyed working with Isaiah and being able to watch him grow and mature over the years. I'm excited for him as he prepares for his next journey."

Bronson enters the school building every day with a friendly "Good Morning" greeting and smile, Stanbery said.

"He's a breath of fresh air. I don't think I've ever seen Bronson upset," Stanbery said. "He makes my day better just by talking with him. Bronson is someone who just lives in a positive way and encourages others to do the same."

Both will be highly missed at the school, she said.

"They are true examples of what we try to do every day at AEC, which is to encourage students to grow individually, in maturity, and to rise above negativity."

**By Justin Faulconer**

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